The Witness to the Founders' Faith.

A SERMON

BEFORE THE

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,

AT THE

SEVENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING,

HELD AT

BOSTON, MASS., OCTOBER 13, 1885.

BY

REV. GEORGE LEON WALKER, D.D.

HARTFORD, CONN.

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SERMON.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. . . . And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."—HEBREWS xi, 13, 39, 40.

BRETHREN AND FRIENDS, — The call which has gathered us here this evening has informed us that this convocation marks the seventy-fifth completed year of the history and work of this American Board of Foreign Missions. A natural instinct in us all, responsive to the arrival of great period-marking epochs, whether in our personal lives or in the lives of social institutions, has already lent a quality of peculiar interest to the occasion, visible enough in this assembly. It has also, to a very considerable extent, determined the character of the suggestions which will be presented to you on this opening evening of our concourse.

As in the individual lives of each one of us, the coming of a twentieth, fortieth, or, if we attain unto it, a seventieth birthday first awakens remembrances of experiences past rather than visions of experiences possibly to come, so to-night it is the fountain of memory, rather than anticipation, which seems mainly to overflow.

At other sessions of this meeting, the forelooking aspect of this anniversary will doubtless be inspiringly presented. Especially delightful is it to know that to-morrow night a master-hand will draw for us some outlines of the glorious prospect visible from the height to which this missionary enterprise has already laboriously climbed. But this evening, with something of the fondness of Experience's retrospective eye, let us turn to the humbler duty of calling to mind their "faith" who, going before us in this endeavor, "saw" the promises "and greeted them from afar"; and especially let us try clearly to discern some features of that "witness" which has been all along borne to their faith, and which has so become, not only a witness to them, but to us an enunciation of certain great guiding principles, which seventy-five years of missionary work have illuminated and emphasized.

To get even a little conception of the fathers' "faith" in embarking on this enterprise requires from us, not mere sympathy and goodwill

only, but some imagination and knowledge also. For although gone only three quarters of a century into the past, theirs was almost another world than ours.

Four young men who, in comparative isolation and obscurity, had been for nearly three years previous thinking and praying over the Master's parting command, "Go, make disciples of all the nations," had, in June, 1810, memorialized the General Association of Massachusetts, assembled that year at Bradford and composed of twenty-eight members, concerning the reasonableness of their desires, and the prospect of their support, in going on a mission to the heathen. Two others would have signed the memorial had it not been feared that the idea of the possible summons to support six missionaries would have at once been fatal to the whole endeavor in the view of the Association. But the Association considered, prayed, and, as we must believe, lifted and inspired by a divinely begotten faith, resolved. A Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of nine men was then and there designated, five of whom met at the house of Rev. Noah Porter, at Farmington, Connecticut, on the seventh of September following, and organized the Board whose seventy-fifth anniversary we are now celebrating.

So stated, the matter does not seem to us very formidable or the performance itself immensely memorable. But we are told by a competent authority that, while some were delighted and even exhilarated, others regarded the whole enterprise as the "very essence of folly." And not strange was it that many so thought. For how different a world that was, and in what a comparative night of gloom on the whole problem of missionary endeavor it was, that the fathers took their prophetic resolve!

The Federal Union was then a youngling of only twenty-one years. But twenty-seven years had gone since the colonies had emerged from an exhausting war with Great Britain, and the ominous notes of preparation were even now sounding for another conflict only two years further on, which was again to embargo every Atlantic port, and to bankrupt half the industries of the land. What we now exult over as the widespread area of our civilized domain was bordered still by savage tribes no further westward than Ohio. Louisiana, an undivided territory stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to British North America, along the whole course of the waters of the Mississippi and Missouri, had been only seven years before a French colony. California was still a Spanish one, unsought unto as yet even for the hides, a sluggish trade wherein long preceded a search for anything else. The total population, sparsely scattered over the vast regions which our national instincts still lead us rather to grasp than to occupy, was little more than one eighth of that which now but partially tenants these wide domains. Wealth was small; the mines of silver and of gold unfound and unconjectured; even those

of iron and coal but little discovered or utilized. Not a rod of railway laid on the continent or in the world. Only two or three slow-creeping steamboats venturing about the quiet river-waters near Philadelphia and New York, with not an expectation in any mind that they could ever breast Atlantic waves.

And the lands toward which imagination turned as the proper arena of missionary endeavor — how comparatively remote, inaccessible, and unknown! Distant India; from whose trading settlements answers to letters might possibly arrive in ten months or a year, doubly hostile to the Gospel by native heathenism and by the jealousy of British commerce. Mysterious Africa; continent of obscurity, guarded by pestilence, walled along its northern shores by the unshaken bulwarks of Mohammedan powers, holding even at that moment in chattel bondage unrescued citizens of England and the United States, and vaguely known all along its western shores as the war-ground of savages and the mart of slaves. Multitudinous China; cut off from religious approach by edicts of exclusion whose resoluteness and strength had only a partial emblem in her circumvallating Tartar wall. Populous Japan; hardly as yet discriminated in thought from China, and equally inaccessible to Christian entrance. Barbarous Pacific Islands; from whose hostile shores returning voyagers brought back tales of cannibalism and death. A far-off, shadow-like, portentous, terror-brooded, awful world!

Meantime, not twenty years had gone since, in the home-land of Great Britain, with all its advantages of commerce, governmental supremacy, and established wealth, the conscience of the churches began first feebly to stir on this subject of missions to the heathen. It was only in 1792 that twelve Baptist ministers at Kettering, in Northamptonshire, united in forming a Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen. The London Missionary Society followed in 1798. The Church Missionary Society, with sixteen ministers of the Establishment, was constituted in 1801. The Methodists had for a few years labored among West India slaves. But so little was generally known or felt of the need and nature of missionary work, that, even after the formation of all of the above-named societies, the great East India Company (constituted in all probability nearly to a man of baptized members of the English Church) put on solemn record in memorial to Parliament that "the sending of missionaries into our Eastern possessions is the maddest, most extravagant, most expensive, most unwarrantable project that was ever proposed by a lunatic enthusiast." And it was not until three years after the formation of our own American Board that the interdict imposed by that company was removed by act of Parliament from the preaching of the Gospel in the Indian provinces of Christian England.

Whatever, therefore, of preparation and example there may have been

in the institution of foreign-missionary societies abroad, or of societies in behalf of American Indians at home, or whatever incentive and encouragement may have been derived from the noble spectacle of the Moravian Brethren, anticipating by more than two generations the zeal for souls of any other branch of the modern Church, or whatever quickening on the question of the Church's duty to those destitute of Gospel light may have come from the great revivals which marked the opening of the century, or from the pages of those few magazines in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York which were gathering eagerly and disseminating the new missionary intelligence of the time, still it cannot be denied that the formation here, under the deterring circumstances I have all too feebly indicated, of this American Foreign Missionary Board was an act of signal and far-sighted faith. For, brethren, it must not be forgotten that the act, however feeble in the outward expression, involved the whole future. It was a distinct recognition and acceptance of the obligation to evangelize "the world." It carried with it, potentially, all that has been done, and all that we or those who come after us can ever do, toward the fulfilment of the Master's behest to "preach the Gospel to every creature." And it did this deliberately, intelligently, and with forecast of labor, difficulty, and sacrifice as great, certainly, as the event has realized. And it becomes us to-night to honor and emulate their faith. Well may we write their names in a new eleventh chapter of Hebrews as those who saw the promises, and "greeted them from afar," and trusted in them though "they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth."

But whenever was it in this ransomed, though still groping and benighted, world that real faith lacked its divine witness? Not always, not often, indeed, does faith receive the full promise which it yearns for, however it may "see" it and "greet it from afar." But a witness to its divine quality, an earnest of its sure fruition, that is seldom long wanting. Certainly it was not wanting in this case which we are contemplating to-night.

The fathers did indeed one after another die. Founders, missionaries, patrons of the Board, they passed on. But gradually ere they went, and with increasing fulness ere the latter of them went, came—and came as distinctly as the fiery sign on Abel's accepted offering or Pentecost's surrendered company—the divine testimony to their trust.

Where are now those four doubting applicants for the sympathy of the Christian Church in the longing of their souls to carry the Gospel of their own salvation to alien climes? Gone indeed from human sight, but beholding ere they went the fast-following ranks of nearly nineteen hundred kindred souls, whom their example inspired and this Board has sent forth.

Where are the nine men of this adjacent region of Massachusetts and Connecticut, designated at first to stand as the churches' representatives in the guidance of this enterprise? Passed long since from earthly view, but their places filled, in successive companies and from ever-widening regions, by the more than six hundred of our churches' wisest and best men, clerical and lay, who have been numbered of this corporate body from twenty-five States of our broadening land.

The fifty converts from heathenism to the Gospel, which in 1820 stood the utmost sum of witness borne to ten years of missionary labor through agency of this Board — how is their testimony lost in the voices of the twenty-three thousand members of Christian churches to-day gathered by its labors on once heathen soil! or in the songs of the ninety thousand such, who have been enrolled therein, but are, most of them, to-night singing round the throne above!

Has the fathers' faith had witness? Ask the three hundred and seventy-five thousand pupils who have been taught in schools conducted by our missionaries. Open a few of the sixteen hundred and fifty millions of pages of Gospel literature disseminated by this Board; spell out the words of Christ in some of the twenty-five languages and dialects in which its messengers tell the story of the cross. *Witness?* Whenever was witness more demonstrative and opulent to any act of faith on earth?

But the precise quality of this witness which has been borne to the faith of those who have gone before us, and especially that about it which makes it illuminative to us for future guidance, will better appear, if, turning from these general illustrations, we look a little more carefully at a few definite points of that testimony which these seventy-five years of missionary history have given and certified.

The power of a great Religious Idea to move and hold the intellect and heart of men — that is one witness to the fathers' faith which this three quarters of a century has made manifest.

A great idea — the Missionary Idea — the idea of the discipling of "all nations," the Christianization of the world, the extension of the Kingdom of God throughout all the earth — that, nothing scantier than that, is the true missionary thought. No comparatively technical and scholastic conception of a gathering out of heathen communities of little companies of the elect — correct as in certain aspects such a conception is; of merely saving here and there a few souls from eternal loss — noble as that enterprise might be, fills out the measure of that missionary idea expressed in Christ's command to "make disciples of all the nations — *panta ta ethne*" — or satisfies the Gospel representation of the universality of Christ's relations to men. The "world" is the object of Christ's ministry, and

"all the nations" through his Gospel are to attain to light and grace. The work must indeed begin with the individual convert and with the formation of little companionships of elect souls; but the ultimate aim is the winning of whole peoples to the Gospel, the converting of the nations to Christ.

It is certainly a true, but it is as certainly a far from complete, conception of the aim of the Gospel merely to convert individual souls. Its mission is to penetrate and transform society. Its work is to leaven the whole mass of human interests with a divinely purifying power. It touches every act and every relationship of humanity with a life from above, and interpenetrates all that man can do with a new spirit and a heavenly light. It affects governments, moulds education, rectifies manners, purifies behavior, sweetens fellowship, makes the common ways of men better, healthier, happier, as well as holier. Its endeavor is to realize a divine society, not hereafter only, but on earth. To have the "Kingdom of God" come, not in the skies alone or the future merely, but here and among men. It is, in short, the Christianization of "the world" at which it points and for which it prays. And the prayer it offers is one taught by the Master himself: "Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth."

And this idea, which is the only one which fits itself to the three-times-uttered missionary command of the Master, or which answers to the historic development of the missionary enterprise — whether in the primitive era, the mediæval period, or modern times — has proved itself to have majestic power to win and hold the thoughts of men. It lacks no element of strength in nerving men to sacrifice or to sustain, to do or to dare.

It dwelt a hundred and fifty years ago, and more than two generations before this American Missionary Board was formed, in the mind of our great Edwards, inciting him to send from his comparative wilderness home at Northampton an appeal for "explicit agreement among God's people in extraordinary prayer for the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth." It expressed itself in the record written by Samuel J. Mills in his diary, while yet an undergraduate in college, "I long to have the time arrive when the Gospel shall be preached to all nations." It found utterance in that declaration of one of the five young men under the shelter of the Williamstown haystack, "that God was always willing to have his Gospel spread throughout the world." And it — nothing scantier, more provincial or technical than it — has been the mainspring of the truest missionary zeal always.

And how in these seventy-five years of latest history this missionary idea has demonstrated its capability mightily and lastingly to control all that is strongest and best in the Christian heart! It has reached

out over the hills and valleys and plains of our widening land, and wherever the foot of Christian pioneer has gone, has broadened the horizon about him with thoughts of a "Kingdom of God" coëxtensive with all the earth. It has entered the hearts of toiling women in remote country farmhouses, and they have dedicated the infants of their cradles, or the unborn infants of their wombs, to the evangelization of "the world." It has touched young men in school and college, and has given them a new object to live for and an inspiration which has never waned. It has stood by dying beds, and amid the gathering shadows of mortality has prompted the bestowment of all that life could leave, in futherance of all that life had loved and labored for. It has taken possession of families, imparting a missionary character to whole households, joining brothers and sisters in the same labors, making sons succeed to their father's toils, and sometimes grandchildren to take up their grandparents' surrendered work. It has developed itself in the Church, modifying the very criteria of proper membership therein; testing Christian character by loyalty to this Christian enterprise. It has reached out on every side, subsidizing commerce, utilizing art, developing literature, compelling the attention of governments, winning the interest of the secular press, becoming one of the great ruling ideas of the age, which statesmen, however they may estimate, must consider, and unbelief, however it may hate, must recognize.

Nor are there signs of decadence in its control. On the contrary the Missionary Idea was never in the history of Christianity so pervasive or so powerful as it is to-day. Not the primitive period of post-apostolic zeal, not the mediæval era of churchly devotion can challenge equality with the age in which we live. Wider in the field of Gospel toil, fuller and more multiform in the agencies employed, larger in results accomplished than in either of those two great mission epochs of the past, is the mission enterprise of this hour. We are entered, unless all signs deceive, on a period which we may call the world-period of missions for the salvation of the world.

Of this, in a narrow way, and in reference to our own Board — one agency only among many others, and far from largest among them — how does this our anniversary gathering testify! We turn to the records of the six earliest annual assemblies of this Board — the private parlor of some hospitable host gave them ample room. In more than one instance his chambers also lodged the assembled company. Nine more meetings enlarged themselves to the occupancy of some portion of a parish vestry. Not for twenty-three years was hazarded the experiment of a public business meeting or entrance for the purpose into a church-edifice. As we look over the assemblies this week will gather in this place, as we turn in thought to those, over all this

and in other lands, whose thoughts and prayers are with us here, can we fail to recognize the "witness" borne to the fathers' "faith" in the growth and dominancy of the Missionary Idea to-day?

Again we discern another witness, speaking distinctly out of this seventy-five years of missionary enterprise, in *the illustrated susceptibility of all qualities of mankind to Spiritual Life and to Citizenship in the Kingdom of God.*

Christianity indeed proved this truth very early. It proved it in the Pentecostal illumination of Jews and proselytes; in the conversion of the Roman centurion, the Cyprian proconsul, the Philippian jailor, and especially in the splendid results on Grecian, Roman, and Barbarian soil, of the missionary labors of the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

But we cannot forget with what difficulty to some Christian minds this truth was proved; or how slowly some good men, and even companions of the Lord Jesus, could credit the equal capability of other men to the experiences and privileges of the new Kingdom. And something of like slowness of belief seems to engender always in the minds of any class of men long in possession of the Gospel, so that this truth of the susceptibility of all men, everywhere, to spiritual life and Christian citizenship needs perpetually to be verified.

And what splendid verification it is receiving from every quarter of the missionary field! The proclamation of the Gospel awakens everywhere a substantial identity of inward experience and of outward behavior. Set up the cross on Greenland snows, and its rude form will soon be wreathed with the same blossoms of faith and love which garland it lifted on Syrian soil. Speak to the ebon dwellers of the equator of salvation by the blood of Christ, and they will crave its purifying power as believingly as the Hebrew Apostle who wrote: "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Proclaim the "Kingdom of God" in China and Japan, and men there will seek citizenship in it, and will manifest loyalty to it and to its King, as earnest and sincere as Netherlandish martyr to the Reformation's faith, or Pilgrim planter of our New England church.

Substantial identity of experience and of behavior is begotten everywhere by the Gospel message. "Substantial identity" I say, for just here it is, perhaps, that our judgment of work accomplished needs most to be generous, and our views of what is to be expected in the future to be enlarged and made catholic.

For, my friends, it is a very severe and sometimes a very unreasonable standard by which we frequently try the quality of Christian work on heathen soil. We often seem to expect, even from the first generation of converts, and it may be these from the midst of savage tribes, a stability of character, a rectitude of morals, a decency of manners,

and an orderliness and intelligence of religious and even of social and political behavior, which among ourselves are the slow fruits only of centuries. We expect too much, and we expect sometimes what ought never to come. For in the wide progress of the Gospel, it is to take hold, not only what is alike in all men, as their sin and need, but what also will forever be unlike, as their temperaments, their tastes, and their ineradicable race feelings and ideas.

The ideals of the Christian life ought not to be expected to be the same everywhere and among all peoples. How those ideals have varied in the line of our own Christian history, and among peoples far closer allied to us in race, and in civil and social institutions, than many to whom this Board carries the gospel to-day! The primitive disciple of the commune at Jerusalem, the soldier disciple of the Roman legion, the Gaulic missionary, the mediæval abbot, the belted crusader, the sandaled palmer, the studious friar, the cloistered nun, the Reformation preacher, the New England pilgrim, the Christian man or matron of our time, — all these are recognized as having been true disciples of the Master; but in how different guise, and in how many points diverse!

If, then, in the line of our own physical and spiritual ancestry we recognize such variation within the bounds of unity, can we expect less in the future developments of Christianity among populations so dissimilar as those with which the Gospel undertakes to deal? We ought not to expect less. To anticipate that Christianity just as it exists among us is to supersede all other forms or ideals of Christianity always, is to narrow it and to narrow mankind.

The wonder of wonders is that the Christ who is humanity's Head and the new Kingdom's King is comprehensive enough to be Lord and brother of men so unlike. To the Occidental he is the occidental, to the Oriental he is the oriental Christ. The cultured Englishman finds nothing in him which is strange; the Bushman African, once brought near to him, finds him familiar no less. In both alike, and in all who come to him, he awakens the experiences and the loyalties of the heavenly citizenship. And this growing, multiplying, diversifying evidence of the susceptibility of all men to spiritual life in Christ bears "witness" to the fathers' "faith" that the Gospel is an ultimate revelation to men, and a revelation for all mankind. They had no other view of it, nor can we have; for in the religion of Christ we have a universal and final religion for man.

Again, the *efficiency in the extension of the Kingdom of God of Spiritual above all Secular Instrumentalities* is another witness borne by this seventy-five years of mission history.

Some degree of coöperation of spiritual and secular instrumentalities, or at least some employment of secular by spiritual ones, seems to be

necessary to the very existence of mission work. It was by the commercially inspired sails of the brigantines *Harmony* and *Caravan* that the first missionaries of this Board were wafted to Calcutta, and every missionary who has followed them and every bill of exchange has gone through channels provided by commerce. A general law of divine Providence seems to require the union of the spiritual with the secular powers in any considerable missionary endeavor. There must be the spiritual motive and aim, and there must be the door-openings and the highway-buildings of secular enterprises. It was along the track of the great military roads of the Roman Empire and on the grain-freighted vessels of its commerce that the first missionaries of the Gospel went on their different work. It was, at least very largely, because at the period of the Reformation the Roman Catholic and not the Protestant powers held the sovereignty of the seas, and voyaged, and discovered, and came in contact with heathen lands, that Protestantism contrasts so unfavorably with the Catholicism of that day in missionary work, and even in missionary desire.

Nay, deeper than this, it becomes us not to forget that political catastrophe and change seems often one of the providentially coöperant agencies by which the Gospel gets its influence, especially over large masses of men. It was not Constantine's conversion alone, but Maxentius' defeat at the Milvian bridge which made Christian the Roman Empire. And similar experiences on a smaller scale, occurring on the change of a dynasty or the conversion of a savage chief, have been repeatedly witnessed in our own day, and will doubtless be increasingly witnessed in time to come. Let the "unspeakable Turk" be driven out of Europe and Asia Minor to the inland plains from whence he came; let the reigning family of Imperial China or Burma be really converted to the Christian faith; let the rulers of Japan embrace the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the world might see again, as in early and mediæval periods, an altered attitude in a day of whole peoples toward the religion of Christ. There is an ancillary and coöperant agency oftentimes to be discovered and hoped for between the world-powers and the powers of the spiritual realm.

Nevertheless the primacy of the spiritual element in all missionary effort remains unchallenged. The extension of civilization is not the extension of Christianity; the Kingdom of the world is not the Kingdom of God. The power for the recovery of man lies, not in the diffusion of intelligence or the rectification of manners, but the renewal of the heart. This is familiar truth, but how emphatically, and how instructively in reference to all missionary endeavor, does it speak forth in the report of the Maharatta Mission in 1854 concerning the twelve thousand scholars who had there been taught in common

schools: "We cannot point to a single case of conversion among all this number."

No, the reliance for missionary success must be, where it ever was, in the direct power of spiritual truth, energized by the divine Spirit from whom it came. And the Gospel makes provision for such success. It makes it in the directness and tremendousness of its appeal to the individual soul, as a being possessed of interests no secular concerns can measure and of destinies no secular considerations have power to determine. It seconds and enforces its appeal by putting into every convert's hands, whatever the strange dialect he may speak, a divine Book for his spiritual guidance; a Book whose divineness is nowhere more plainly seen than in its power to hold whoever takes it for his counselor, loyal and steadfast, amid whatever great or little secularities of life, to the claims of the spiritual world. And it makes provision for the propagation of the same spiritual work in others, by charging each rescued one with his brother's keeping, the impartation of the light which has enlightened him.

So that the ideal of the Gospel (whether on home or heathen soil) is that every convert becomes a missionary, every church or mission-station a training-school for promulgators of salvation. The spread of the Gospel is thus secured by the coöperation of those won to the Gospel. As has been beautifully said by one who was once himself a heathen: "The tree of heathenism falls at last under those axes whose helves are made from its own branches."

And this ideal of a pure, direct, single-eyed spiritual work discerned even from the first, but emphasized with every advance of Christianity on home or foreign soil is that to which we are called. Welcome indeed to the aid of commerce. Let art and literature, if they will, become the handmaids of Christianity; let the chariot of salvation be sped on its way by the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, or by the steam-engines of America and England, but let the bearer of the Gospel tidings ever remember that the simple, saving, effectual message given him to proclaim is this: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life."

This observation concerning the character of the saving message of Christianity suggests the further witness borne by our seventy-five years' missionary experience to *the power and the necessity of a Simple Gospel as the Gospel of missions.*

Christianity claims the allegiance of mankind. It is as a religion for the whole human family that it alone justifies missionary endeavor. But signal as are the successes of Christianity on some fields of its promulgation, nearly three quarters of our race are outside the boundaries of its influence, are most of them ignorant of its very existence.

By the latest and most careful estimates, above ten hundred millions of mankind are thus the legitimate but yet unreached objects of what claims to be an intendedly universal religion. But who are these thousand millions who are to be sought after and gathered into the Gospel fold? Among them are individuals and classes, certainly, of great intellect and learning; some races marked by mental acuteness and subtlety, but most of them ignorant, degraded, darkened, and all of them strangers to the ideas and habits of mind made familiar to us by long contact with Christianity.

Obviously, if these multitudes are to be reached at all it must be by a Gospel of extreme simplicity. If any hope is ours to win these various and benighted millions to the Christian faith, then Christianity must be presented to them in a form suited to their capacities, level to their grasp, fitted to their wants. Then it must be the plain, necessary truths of salvation, and in general these alone, which the Gospel messenger must proclaim. Then it cannot be the refinements of scholastic divinity, or the points of difference which separate good men in the explanation of the Gospel scheme, which can profitably be ventilated on heathen soil.

The missionary enterprise long ago theoretically learned — though it has never ascertained exactly how practically to deal with the fact — that denominational differences among Christians are stumbling-blocks on pagan ground. It is learning now that doctrinal differences are stumbling-blocks no less. This is a truth, indeed, which the Holy Spirit apparently attempted to teach early. The new converts at Antioch were troubled and perplexed by the subtleties of Jerusalem divinity. All they knew of the Gospel came from Jerusalem; but Jerusalem had various voices. The one voice said this, and the other voice said that; but both coupled with their sayings: "Except a man do this, he cannot be saved." And it required nothing short of a council whereof the Holy Ghost was a member and himself nominated in the decree, to state afresh and in their simplicity the Gospel demands.

The painful fact is in many ways brought home to us that the points of speculative opposition on which schools of divinity among us separate, and on which churches and parties in the church divide, are simply obstructive when transferred to missionary soil. What they are among ourselves is not now the question, but what they are when carried to regions where strange peoples await in ignorance the rising on them of a little Gospel light, is not merely matter of conjecture. When it comes to be a troublesome question to Japanese inquirers: "What is the efficacious principle of the atonement?" or, "What the exact extent and basis of the predestinating decree?" or, "What the

method and fulness of Biblical inspiration?" or, when South Sea Islanders, under the teaching of Bishop Pattison, find themselves perplexed about the precise character of Christ's bodily presence in the Eucharist — till the noble Bishop, with all his sacramentarian training, rises to the apostolic height of such a simple presentation of the Supper, aided by illustrations drawn from their own pagan festivals, as the poor heathen Christians can understand and respond to, — why then it becomes us to remind ourselves for the sake of a world ready to perish, how simpler than the simplest of our theologies is the saving message of the Gospel and the plain condition of eternal life. Mortifying as it may be for us to consider how large a part of our strength here at home is spent on questions non-essential to salvation, whether of ourselves or of others, imperative is it to consider it and to act on it, if the Gospel of Christ is ever to be effectually addressed to the souls of ignorant, feeble, toiling, heathen men, whether of foreign lands or of our own.

A Missionary Gospel is a simple Gospel. It has been from the first. The precise nature and results of Adamic connections, the ontological distributions of the divine personalities, the reconciliation of responsibility and decree, discussions of the provinces of resistible and irresistible grace, provings or disprovings of final perseverance in holiness, explications of the relative efficiency of the divine and human factors in the conversion of a soul, have no place therein. It rang out first in the simple declaration: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," and it has no other utterance to-day. Let it be that one of the great general creeds of Christendom, enumerating its more than fifty definite, abstract particulars concerning the inherent nature of the Triune Personality, declares: "This is the Catholic faith, which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." It comforts us, nevertheless, to know that a great and accepted missionary of the Gospel has said: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And it is the divine witness to the efficiency of the Gospel preached, in large measure, in the simplicity of its first promulgation that we celebrate to-day. Whatever of power there has been in it, this has been the hiding of its strength.

I call your attention to but one more witness to the fathers' faith, which speaks out of this seventy-five years of missionary history.

This is the witness of *a continually enlarging conception of Gospel Truth, and of the comprehensiveness of the Kingdom of God.*

The simplicity of the conditions of salvation, and of the terms of entrance into the kingdom of heaven, have just been spoken of. But

the simplicity of these things should not blind us to the fact that the Gospel is the wisdom of God and that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of infinite knowledge and truth. The Gospel is not the "power of God" to the salvation of the soul from death only, but is the "wisdom of God" also to the satisfaction of all the proper demands of man's intellect and heart forever. And it is one signal testimony to the dignity and divineness of the missionary enterprise that it has done so much to enlarge the boundaries of our knowledge in things human and divine.

What the missionary enterprise has done for certain departments of human learning, like geography and philology, has been universally admitted by those who know most of those sciences. The names of such men as Livingstone and Coan and Smith and Williams stand as representative examples of men universally recognized as having widened the area of human knowledge, concerning the peoples and languages and dwelling-places of mankind.

Less conspicuous, perhaps, but not less real has been the contribution of missions to a higher knowledge than this. The work of missions has reacted upon the Church, vivifying many a conception of religious truth, and enlarging the view of the majesty of Christ's salvation and of his kingdom. We are most deeply, though not always very consciously, indebted to the influences and suggestions which come from missionary ground, for a very considerable part of the energy with which certain great and familiar facts of religious truth appeal to us to-day.

The Fatherhood of God: It is easy to deduce the doctrine from Holy Writ; it is easy to claim it for ourselves; it is easy to assert that it must belong to Gentile as well as to Jew, and to all men everywhere; but how comparatively narrow and dim and personal our conception of that Fatherhood must be, till, stretching ourselves in imagination and sympathy as far as we may over the wide reach of all the vast, multiform, well nigh infinite variety of physical, mental, moral, social, experimental diversity which differences men, and of which missionary effort for them assures us more than any knowledge beside, we learn to say in their behalf as realizingly as in our own: "Our Father which art in Heaven; equally near to every one of us"!

The Extent of Christ's Atonement: We argue its universality from the greatness of the sacrifice; we think it must be universal because no sin seems to be outside its saving power but does not the most affecting vision of its measureless reach of grace rise on us when, from some mountain-top of world-survey of the illimitable sea of human guilt and the illimitable variety of its woe, we behold also the cross of Christ, reaching its arms of suffering and benediction over all, and

hear the voice saying, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"?

The absoluteness of Christ's connection with individual human destiny: We are told of it in that statement of old time, "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"; it reaffirms itself in that representation of the Master where he depicts the gathering before him of "all nations"; it speaks out in his plain declaration that God hath "committed all judgment to the Son"; but we get our most vivid apprehension of the fact when, amid all the diversities of human nature and human experience besides, we see that not a soul of man on earth is ever really brought into contact with him but it recognizes him at once as its natural Sovereign and Lord, as its proffered Saviour and Friend, and as its adequate and certain Judge.

The comprehensiveness of the Kingdom of God: We read of its many gates — three on the north, three on the east, three on the south, and three on the west — and we think of the Jews and proselytes and the gathered of the Gentiles thronging through the open doors. But it is when we remember that China's slant-eyed millions, and Fiji's cannibal tribes, and Africa's jungle-haunting swarms, and Greenland's snow-burrowing inhabitants, are all capable of citizenship therein, with equal loyalty to the King and equal provision for every variety of spiritual want, that the comprehensiveness of Christ's Kingdom comes most home to us as a reality, and the universality of his relations to humanity becomes the grandest of truths.

The work of missions illuminates and enlarges for us the Truth. We are indebted to it for widening conceptions of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. As in the Church of the apostolic days the ingrafting of the wild-olive of the Gentile alone saved the Church from a new legalism and bondage, so the missionary enterprise is the savior of Christianity to-day from narrowness and selfishness, if not from decay and death.

Brethren and friends, these it seems to me are some of the elements of the "witness" which the seventy-five years of this Board's missionary history has borne to the Founders' Faith. Plain it is in the retrospect that they saw the promises and believed in their fulfilment, though they knew themselves to be but strangers and pilgrims on the earth. It is in the light of that glorious, multiplying witness that we lift up our hearts in praise to-night.

But they "received not the promise." Better things than they ever attained were to arrive. They were to wait a making perfect at other hands. And they are waiting still. But other hands are taking up the burden. Other faith is supplementing theirs. The signs are auspicious

around us that the hope in which they died is not much longer to linger. On all the wings of time it hastens. The night is waning, the morning is near. Come, Lord Jesus, and quickly take Thine own. Use us and ours in Thy victorious service. Employ, we entreat thee, the Church of Thy yet living disciples to perfect the fathers' faith in the reception of the promises!